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ABSTRACT

To address low reading achievement of Haitian elementary school students receiving English-as-a-Second-Language instruction, a technique for reading instruction using Haitian folk tales was implemented. It was anticipated that by drawing on students' background knowledge of the Haitian oral tradition and using Haitian literature as a storytelling text, students would make the vital link between print and oral language. A target group of fourth- and fifth-grade Haitian students participated in storytelling sessions. Using a language experience approach, students recorded and illustrated the stories in a book format, then shared their books and stories with other classes. Results showed increased reading skills in the target group. No significant gain was found in self-esteem, which was consistently high both before and after the project. The group indicated a preference for Haitian books over American books. Student writing doubled in quantity over the 12-week treatment period, and critical thinking skills were enhanced. It is concluded that use of Haitian folk tales was effective in increasing literacy skills. The reading assessment tool, initial and post-treatment student surveys, and the critical thinking checklist used in the project are appended. (Author/MSE)

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HAITIAN FOLKTALES AS A LITERACY STRATEGY FOR ELEMENTARY HAITIAN ESOL STUDENTS

by

Kristen L. Oscarsson

A Practicum Report

Submitted to the Faculty of the Center for Advancement
of Education of Nova University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science.

The abstract of this report may be placed in a
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Haitian Folktales as a Literacy Strategy for Elementary Haitian ESOL Students.

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The low reading scores of intermediate elementary Haitian students who receive English as a Second Language instruction was addressed by implementing a literacy strategy based upon storytelling Haitian folktales. By drawing upon the Haitian student's literacy background knowledge of the oral tradition, and selecting Haitian literature as the storytelling text, students were led to make the vital connection between print and oral language. A target group of fourth and fifth-grade Haitian students participated in storytelling sessions. Using a Language Experience Approach, the students recorded and illustrated the stories in a book format. The students then became storytellers as they shared their books with other classes in the practicum setting. In addition to increasing reading skills, the curriculum was designed to improve student self-esteem, motivation in regard to literacy activities, and critical thinking skills.

The results indicated increased levels of reading skills for the target group. No significant gain was measured in regard to the affective objective of improved self-esteem, as the students scored consistently high in this domain in both the pre- and posttest survey. The selection of literacy activities remained high throughout the treatment, with the target group demonstrating a preference of Haitian books over American books. Student writing doubled in quantity over the 12-week treatment period. Critical thinking skills were also enhanced. It was concluded that the use of Haitian folktales was an effective tool in increasing literacy skills. Appendices include the reading assessment tool, pre/post student survey, and critical thinking checklist.

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CHAPTER I

Purpose

The practicum's setting was an urban elementary school located in a southern border state of the United States which serves as a port of entry for many foreigners. In order to serve this area's largely Hispanic and Haitian community, the school in question had been designated as one of the District's 25 elementary schools designed to educate speakers of other languages. In addition to the indigenous school population of 750 students, the center draws approximately 150 foreign students from the surrounding area who require special instruction in English as a Second Language. Of the school's total ESOL student body, 75% are Hispanic, 20% Haitian, while the remaining 5% represent a variety of other ethnicities.

The District's procedure for ESOL placement requires that every student who speaks a language other than English receives an English oral language assessment. The outcome of this assessment will furnish each student with an initial language classification of either A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, or C2. Students who receive language classifications of A1-C1 are considered limited English proficient and are recommended for placement in an ESOL center closest to their home residence.

Such placement may extend for up to a six-year period of ESOL instruction.

The 14 students who made up the sample population were part of a combined fourth and fifth grade ESOL class where the ratio of students was 50 percent Haitian, 44 percent Hispanic, three percent Brazilian, and three percent Polish. As the study was specifically designed to promote literacy in the Haitian students, only the fourth and fifth grade Haitian students received the treatment. Due to attrition, only 12 students completed the treatment. Of the remaining students, 11 were in the fifth grade and one was in the fourth grade. Six of the students were female and six were male. The average age of the students was 11.5 years. Ten students had been receiving ESOL instruction for an average of three years and two students were in their seventh year of ESOL instruction. As was reflected by the students' language classifications of B1 or B2, all spoke English fairly well. The two students who had been in the program for over six years demonstrated complete fluency in English. These two students, along with two others, received Chapter I services in math and reading.

The researcher's role in the setting was that of a first-grade ESOL teacher. Initially assigned to the fifth grade class that made up the sample population, the researcher was familiar with the Haitian students who participated in the study.

The generally low-economic status of the target population allowed for 70 percent of the sample group to qualify for a free lunch program. The students' low-economic status could possibly have influenced this study in the following ways:

- a) Caretakers may work long hours and therefore be less available for shared reading time with their children.
- b) Families of low income may not have the resources necessary to provide reading material for their children.
- c) Caretakers may have a low level of formal education which very likely would have an influence on the amount of literacy behavior modelled in the home.

As participants in the ESOL program, the students were obligatorily members of a minority group. While some students may have been born in the U.S., the majority have immigrated to this county. As the young age of the students would suggest, the choice of immigration has resided in the parents and/or legal guardians. The students therefore who made up the sample group may or may not have wished to leave their home country. Affective factors resulting from the physical displacement and the resulting social and linguistic adjustments that such change necessitates were taken into consideration when assessing the needs of this population.

Elementary children learning English as a Second Language (ESOL) are faced with a multitude of challenges, not the least

of which is becoming literate in the new language. Current research in the field of reading development in bilingual children has demonstrated that literacy skills are transferable from the home language to the target language. While such a fact is an invaluable learning tool for the majority of ESOL students, what of the foreign students who are not literate in their home language? Reading for these students entails not only decoding a new language, but simultaneously decoding the complex system of literacy.

For Haitian students, literacy skills are an area in which many are alarmingly deficient. For instance, at the conclusion of the past academic year, the average score on the reading subtest of the Stanford Achievement Test of the fourth and fifth grade Haitian ESOL students who participated in the study was 13.72 percent. One of the standards the District has set for the fourth and fifth grade ESOL students to exit the ESOL program is that the student must score on or above the 33rd percentile on the reading subtest of the Stanford Achievement Test. Thus, a discrepancy of 19.27 percent on the reading subtest must be overcome if the Haitian ESOL students are to join the mainstream classroom with a minimum of delay. The issue at hand is, therefore, not merely one of improving literacy skills, but doing so in the most efficient manner

possible to allow students to overcome the one to two reading levels they lag behind.

The District's philosophy of ESOL instruction is one of sheltered immersion. The fourth and fifth grade students' typical day included two hours of language arts, one hour of math, one hour of either social studies, science, or health, one-half hour of either art, physical education, music, or library science, and two weekly one-half hour sessions of computer science. Mainstreaming in content area subjects and/or specials may be recommended for students who have attained a certain level of language proficiency. At the time of the study, however, the class was completely self-contained.

The school in which the study took place was in the second year of piloting a Whole Language Arts program. The ESOL students' curriculum was therefore based upon a Whole Language philosophy. The students received two hours of daily language arts instruction using the Houghton Mifflin reading curriculum as well as phonics instruction. The curriculum was complimented by five learning centers, three of which were language based (listening, reading, and writing). Students could freely choose the center at which they wished to work during the 30 minutes provided for this activity each day.

The students' low literacy levels were addressed by placing them in the second half of the third grade Houghton Mifflin

reading series. The classroom teacher's expectation was that the fifth grade students would attain a 4² reading level at the conclusion of the academic year. In the best of scenarios, expectations were low: fifth grade students would enter middle school with reading skills approximately one year below grade level. A more effective reading program was therefore crucial if students were ever to overcome this discrepancy.

Research supports that the degree to which the ESOL students' culture practices and values literate behavior will influence their degree of literacy experience, which in turn will have an impact on students' literacy skills. Therefore, in assessing the literacy needs of Haitian students, special consideration must be given to the role literacy has traditionally played in the Haitian culture.

The linguistic history of the Haitian population is such that until recently Haitian-Creole was solely an oral language. While Creole was declared the semiofficial language of Haiti in 1978, and has gradually become a written language, the majority of the Haitian population is not literate. Those who are literate may or may not be literate in their native tongue. Haiti's 1982 census found that 37 percent of the population over ten years of age was literate; however, in rural areas only 28 percent was literate. Unfortunately, the census neglected to indicate in which language the people surveyed were literate:

French or Haitian-Creole (Library of Congress, 1991). While educated Haitians may be literate in French, this fact does not necessarily indicate that as parents they would read to their offspring in French. The reason for this is that most Haitian children will only learn French upon entry in the Haitian educational system. It is therefore likely that most Haitian children have never been exposed to shared reading in their native language. The gap between home and school literacy practices must be overcome if Haitian students are to fully integrate into the mainstream educational system.

Further obstacles to the successful integration of the Haitian students are rooted in historical, economic, linguistic, and social factors which have greatly influenced the self-concept of the Haitian people. Haitians belong to a culture whose roots lie in a country that is ranked as the poorest in the Northern Hemisphere (Library of Congress, 1991). To compound the problem, as most Haitians speak a Creole language, they perceive themselves as being affiliated with the lower end of a culturally-defined linguistic dichotomy. Many have sought refuge in the U.S. only to find themselves members of a minority group persecuted by both racial and ethnic discrimination. It is not uncommon for a Haitian student to bitterly complain of namecalling. Sadly enough, the insults are often directed at the Haitian's ethnic background. Therefore, a

strategy which would concomitantly promote literacy skills in the Haitian students while fostering an improved self-concept appeared to the author to be in great need.

The main objective of the practicum was to improve literacy skills in Haitian students by maximizing the background knowledge they bring to the task of reading. A literacy program was thus developed to address the Haitian students' specific background knowledge by incorporating culturally familiar text via a culturally familiar literacy activity (storytelling). The first objective was that upon completion of the 12-week treatment, the Chapter I Informal Reading Inventory would measure an increase of a .75 grade level in 60 percent of the Haitian students in the fourth and fifth grade ESOL class and 35 percent of the target group would improve in reading skills by a .5 grade level.

It was thought that by building upon the students' literacy background knowledge, critical thinking skills would also be enhanced to improve understanding of story structure. The second objective, therefore, was that upon completion of the 12-week treatment, 100 percent of the target group would incur a 20 percent increase in critical thinking skills as measured by a comparative analysis of story structure in student writing.

The writer felt that as students gradually learned to make the vital connection between oral language and print that attitudes toward literacy would improve. While storytelling in and of itself is a motivating introduction to literature, the researcher posited that this literary experience would be rendered all the more stimulating by selecting stories relevant to oneself. Thus, the third objective was that at the conclusion of the 12-week period, 100 percent of the target group would demonstrate a 25 percent increase in the selection of literacy activities as measured by the classroom teacher's observation of class activities and a 40 percent increase in length of student writing.

The researcher anticipated that by learning more about one's own cultural heritage, the students would experience a greater understanding and appreciation of themselves as members of the Haitian community. Lastly, as the Haitian students took on the role of storytellers and shared these stories with other classes, it was hoped that a mutual exchange of cultural awareness would enhance relations within and outside the educational setting. Therefore, an additional affective outcome was that 100 percent of the target group would incur a 20 percent increase in self-esteem as measured by a student survey administered before and after the 12-week treatment.

CHAPTER II

Research and Solution Strategy

Much research has been done in the field of emergent literacy in the ESOL student. Rarely, however, has the specific issue of literacy in the Haitian student been addressed. Most studies are inclusive of the multitude of ethnic groups in need of ESOL training, namely Asian, Hispanic, Eastern European, and Haitian. Therefore, little research was found solely reflecting statistics of Haitian students. In light of the thesis that cultural affiliation plays an important role in literacy development, the researcher was skeptical of studies that combined statistics of ethnic groups with vast differences in literacy practices. However, the following studies that involved mostly Haitian students were found to be helpful.

The New York City Board of Education designed a bilingual program to address the needs of elementary and high school Haitian students by implementing culturally and linguistically relevant curricula (1986). The format for bilingual education, however, is not one adopted by the District in which the practicum was held. Therefore, although this model of instruction proved moderately successful in meeting its

objectives, it was not deemed feasible for this study. Nonetheless, the concept of introducing culturally relevant material was taken into account and incorporated in the curriculum design.

In Ariza's 1990 study conducted in Dade County, participants were mainly Hispanic or Haitian. The program's aims were to develop rapid acquisition of English, academic, and literacy skills while promoting a more positive self-image and lowering drop-out rates. The program was based on a bilingual curriculum in content areas. The outcome of this program reinforced the researcher's belief that rapid acquisition of literacy skills and reinforcement of a positive self-image were complimentary objectives of primary importance.

The largest body of literature, however, dealt with secondary level Haitian students. One such typical project, "Guidance Oriented Acquisition of Learning Skills," was undertaken in 1989-90 by the New York City Board of Education. Job orientation and drop-out prevention were objectives that were identified and carried out with success in many similar projects throughout the nation. Earlier studies addressed the need to educate Haitian parents and to train ESOL teachers and teacher associates who instruct Haitian students. One such study entitled, "Haitian Parent and Teacher Training Program (Project

HAPTT)" was successfully conducted in New York from 1981-1984 (Berotte and Blot).

While the researcher perused the literature, a natural pattern seemed to emerge: districts developed impressive programs to immediately address the urgent need to prepare their new immigrant population to become productive members of society. Teachers and associates were trained to provide the Haitian population with the English skills and job training upon which economic survival depended. The Haitian adults most in need of survival skills were addressed foremost.

As a result, the past decade has brought about great strides in ESOL instruction in all its varied formats. For example, the District in question has heeded the above-mentioned research and has successfully implemented ESOL programs for adults which are free and readily accessible. In regard to teacher training, the State has mandated that all teachers who instruct ESOL students complete training in ESOL strategies. In view of such a monumental effort to meet the needs of our foreign population, a question begs to be answered: how can we explain the target group's alarmingly low scores on the reading subtest of the Stanford Achievement Test?

Perhaps the answer may be found in the seeming wealth of literature: of the nearly 300 reports found in the literature search, not one study was found that specifically addressed

elementary Haitian students. By providing programs for the masses, have we unwittingly ignored that each culture may have different learning styles, background knowledge, literacy practices, expectations, and needs?

The great influx of Haitian students in the United States, and especially in the border state in which this study was held, behooves us to specifically assess this group's educational needs. The reading subtest of the Stanford Achievement Test clearly indicates that literacy skills are alarmingly deficient in the Haitian student: therefore, the possible influence Haitian culture could have upon the development of literacy skills is an area that merits our attention.

The prior knowledge students bring to the task of reading will have a substantial impact on their success (Clay, 1991, Johnston, 1984, Levesque, 1989, Martinez and Roser, 1985, Morrow, 1992, Reilly, 1989). Assessing and defining "prior knowledge" in regard to the ESOL student are essential in gaining understanding of the student's perspective. Prior knowledge for the ESOL student may be viewed as two components: literacy background knowledge and cultural background knowledge. In assessing the ESOL student's prior knowledge, the researcher relied heavily upon the sociocultural and sociolinguistic influences previously discussed and as

defined by the terms "cultural background knowledge" and "literacy background knowledge" as follows.

Cultural Background Knowledge

The researcher conducted an informal experiment with a group of 30 teachers, 80 percent of whom were American, 17 percent West Indian, and 3 percent Nigerian. As a group, the participants were each given a red apple and were asked to brainstorm all the possible lexical items, descriptions, and cultural associations that the apple brought to mind. Approximately 60 concepts were quickly listed on the chalkboard, half of the terms were descriptions ("tart," "juicy," "Delicious"), while the other half were culturally related concepts such as "Johnny Apple Seed," "William Tell," "rotten apple," "Adam and Eve," etc.

The same group was then presented with a yucca and asked to brainstorm similar associations. The foreign participants were instructed beforehand to remain silent until the American participants had exhausted all of their knowledge of the yucca. The American participants were able to illicit only a few descriptions such as "root," "oblong," and "dark." The West Indian and Nigerian participants, who were extremely familiar with this root that serves as a staple in their home countries, proceeded to brainstorm in a proliferous way for

approximately 15 minutes. The cultural information that they provided was every bit as extensive as the result of the apple brainstorming.

The group was then presented with two books, one featuring an apple on the cover, the other featuring a yucca. When asked to which book they felt their prior knowledge would play a greater role, the American participants selected the apple book and the West Indian and Nigerian participants chose the book that showed the yucca on the cover. Albeit an informal experiment, the outcome clearly suggests that cultural origin influences prior knowledge.

Researchers at the University of Pittsburgh studied how a reader's background knowledge influences the degree of text comprehension and found that "not only does lack of knowledge about a topic impede comprehension, but the extent of knowledge influences the quality of understanding that a reader can construct" (Beck, Loxterman, McKeown, Sinatra, 1992: 79). In an earlier study cited by Carver (1992), Johnston (1984) found a strong correlation between prior knowledge and reading comprehension test scores. His research was based on reading comprehension passages representing rural and urban cultures. The readers were selected to represent two diverse background groups: urban and rural. While Johnston's intent was not explicitly to measure to what extent cultural

background knowledge determines reading comprehension, his findings may serve as an indicator that a student's specific cultural knowledge is in fact an important determinant in reading comprehension.

Linguists agree that language reflects and influences our perception of reality. Olson stated that written text goes one step further in this acculturation process by presenting "distinctive pictures of reality or forms of knowledge" (Baker and Freebody, 1985: 382). Acculturating ESOL students in the target culture to master text in the target language may be seen as an ultimate objective of ESOL instruction (Delpit, 1991). However, simultaneously learning the concept of literacy with the multitude of culturally related concepts hidden in the written word may be too cognitively demanding for the pre-literate ESOL student. One way to develop literacy concepts without the double burden of decoding culture would be to introduce ESOL students to literature that contains concepts with which they are familiar.

In another study, the impact of story familiarity and listening comprehension was investigated by repeated storytelling to primary age children (Martinez and Rose, 1985). In comparing the child's verbal reaction to readings of familiar and unfamiliar text, the following outcomes were noted:

(1) Children in both settings (home and school) talked *more* when they were familiar with the story; (2) the children's talk changed *form* when they were familiar with the story, (3) the children's story talk tended to *focus* on different aspects of the story as the story was read again, and (4) when the story was read repeatedly, the children's responses indicated greater *depth* of understanding (p. 783).

Story familiarity also helped students make more accurate predictions, created increased attention span, and improved the children's appreciation of the story. While story familiarity in the Martinez and Rose study was due to frequent repeated readings, the concept of "text familiarity" has implications for the practicum's thesis of cultural prior knowledge. It was projected that by presenting students with stories set in their own cultural context, the possibility of story familiarity would increase, thereby maximizing the student's prior knowledge. For the purpose of this study, Haitian folktales translated in English were intended to provide the Haitian students with a bridge to literacy that would transcend such cultural obstacles.

Literacy Background Knowledge

Literary background knowledge of concepts regarding the relationship of oral and written language is one of the critical aspects of emergent literacy (Roberts, 1992). In order to

ascertain what research had been done in the field of emergent literacy, the author first turned to the early childhood/primary specialists. Although the following studies do not specifically pertain to emergent literacy in the ESOL student, the fundamental stages of first-language literacy skills do have a great deal of relevance for the pre-literate ESOL student.

Morrow states that "children exposed to literature accumulate background knowledge not only about the content at hand but also about how language works and how written language differs from spoken" (1992: 251). Holdaway (1979), defined four processes that aid children in the development of literacy skills: observation of literacy behaviors, collaboration, practice, and performance (Morrow, 1992). Children who do not partake of or observe literacy behavior in the home environment may likely be deprived of these four fundamental processes. Early childhood researchers, Fernie, Kantor, and Miller (1992), support this constructive view of literacy development: "Overall, young children are no longer viewed as passengers in a maturation process which gets them ready to read; rather, they are seen as active constructors of their own literacy knowledge in a long process of becoming literate which might begin essentially from birth" (p. 185). The link between social context and literacy is clear when children who interact and observe others in a print-rich environment develop

cognitive skills that lead to literacy (Fernie, et al., 1992). From a sociocultural perspective of literacy, one must first look at how literacy meanings are developed in the home culture through values, practices, and traditions shared within the sociocultural community. From this vantage point, we can begin to assess the Haitian student's background knowledge in regard to literacy.

Historically, social and political strife have had severe ramifications upon Haiti's literacy development. While approximately 10 percent of Haiti's population is francophone, the vast majority are monolingual Haitian-Creole speakers. Up until the 1980's, monolingual speakers had little access to literature in Creole (Library of Congress, 1991). The fact that Haitian-Creole has for centuries been exclusively an oral language has not however prevented certain literacy events from playing a preponderant role in Haitian social life. The popular tradition of storytelling has served as an important literacy activity in Haiti for centuries. As such, storytelling is an important process in Haiti's literacy tradition. Many early childhood researchers regard storytime as a structured literary event and include this activity as an integral part of curriculum for language development and literacy (Fernie, et al., 1992). With reference to Holdaway's four processes that bolster literacy skills, storytime would encompass at the very least the

first process -- that of observation of literacy behaviors (Morrow, 1992). For the older Haitian students, storytelling might also entail the three remaining processes of collaboration, practice, and performance. While this literacy experience pales in comparison to the approximate 3,000 hours of shared reading the average American child brings to kindergarten, it is nonetheless a valued point of departure in literacy development.

The "gap" between Haitian students' literacy experiences and that of their American counterparts may thus be seen as the sociolinguistic discrepancy of the norm of literacy behavior of two divergent cultures. The solution in this regard may be seen as two fold: the Haitian students' literacy experiences must be enhanced to simulate the natural development of literacy skills of American children. To facilitate this process, the researcher commenced at the stage of literacy development with which the Haitian student is familiar, and conveniently, where both the American and Haitian literacy experiences interface: storytelling. It was hoped that by drawing upon the Haitian student's literacy background knowledge of the oral tradition, that students would be led to make the vital connection between print and oral language.

CHAPTER III

Method

The treatment was conducted by the researcher who met daily with the target group during a 30-minute session in an adjacent classroom. The materials necessary were chart paper, writing paper, construction paper for book covers, and machines for laminating and binding the student-made books. A principal resource was the regular classroom teacher of the target group who cooperated by freeing the students to participate in the daily sessions and by keeping a log of the students' choice of literacy activities during time set aside for learning centers. Other resources included the many teachers who cooperated by receiving the storytellers in their classrooms.

The treatment was carried out in the following six-step format:

Step 1: The researcher introduced the story, "Bouki dances the Kokioko" from The Magic Orange Tree written by Diane Wolkstein. The students were excited to hear of the mischievous character, "Bouki," whom they all recalled having heard about in folktales told at home. The student's prior

knowledge of the story's characters and themes did not need to be drawn out. In fact, the students were so excited to have the opportunity to talk about their own "Bouki" and "Petit Malice" stories (principal characters in Haitian folktales), that the first session was pleasantly spent as students shared stories of the mischievous and greedy "Petit Malice" and the naive and gentle "Bouki."

The following day the students were excited as the researcher told them the story, "Bouki dances the Kokioko." The students could not contain their surprise that an American teacher knew a Haitian story. "How do you know this!", they demanded with huge smiles. The students were amazed and delighted as the researcher showed them a copy of the book, The Magic Orange Tree; the sparse illustrations were poured over and admired at length (Wolkstein, 1978).

During the actual storytelling, the participants did not need to be encouraged to demonstrate active listening: they chimed in at times, asked questions, mimed the King's dance, facial expressions, and gestures that portrayed the story's meaning. During the teacher-guided discussion that concluded the storytelling session, the students eagerly volunteered opinions and surmised the story plot, each time demonstrating complete story comprehension. As the story's theme is typical of the tricks that "Petit Malice" plays on characters such as the naive

"Bouki," the students anticipated the story's twist and their burst of laughter at "Bouki" being tricked yet once again indicated that their prior knowledge facilitated story comprehension.

Step 2: The teacher retold the story acting out each character's role. The students' enjoyment of the storytelling was clear: their willingness to act as engaged listeners was at times so overwhelming that it seemed they made no distinction between the "literary experience" they were encountering and "pure entertainment." Discussion of plot, characters, and details ensued as story comprehension deepened. During this time the teacher took on a more verbally passive role and intently listened as the students' verbosely discussed the story. With reference to the criteria listed on the Critical Thinking and Self-Reflection Checklist, "teaching and learning occurred often without teacher talk" from this step onward (Appendix M: 56).

Step 3: The students now knew the story by heart and were eager to tell it to one another. Using a Language Experience Approach, the teacher illicited from the participants the story's sequence and recorded these elements verbatim on chart paper. The students concluded by choral reading the story sequence they had dictated. The more orally proficient students corrected the oral language of their classmates, yet none seemed to be inhibited. Ownership of the story was fully

theirs, and they were delighted to demonstrate their knowledge.

Step 4: A review took place by choral reading the story sequence written on chart paper and a discussion of events ensued. Students who wished to add more details at this point were encouraged to do so. The students were now invited to retell the story as a class. A minimum of teacher guidance was necessary as the students accurately retold the story sequence. With apparent enjoyment, the students corrected one another whenever a sequence was left out or they recalled a detail the others had forgotten. With reference to criteria listed on the Critical Thinking and Self-Reflection Checklist, "students often spontaneously engaged in critiquing each other's thinking" and "actively listened to each other very often." (Appendix M: 56).

Step 5: The students were told that the purpose of the next activity was so that they could become storytellers and share these stories with other children in the school. In order to recall the story, it was explained that it would be helpful to write and illustrate the story themselves. Once having written the story, they could visit other classes to share their book.

The participants were each given a "book" made of ten blank pages and covered in construction paper. The pages were the size of a big book and had several lines at the bottom for writing and space above for illustrations.

The students were directed to refer to the chart paper to recall the story's sequence and to rewrite and illustrate the story themselves. They were told that they could copy the class-composed outline, write in their own words, or use a combination of both the outline and free writing. Students were encouraged to write as many of the details as they could remember.

Once the writing was finished, the students were asked to illustrate each part of the story above where they had written. They were encouraged to take their book home with them and work on finishing the illustrations. They were told that once they had finished writing and illustrating the book, that they should return it to the teacher so that finishing touches could be added: the books would be laminated and attractively bound by the researcher and promptly returned to the students.

This step was where the project fell short of the projected outcome. Rather than the single 30-minute session in which the researcher had planned for student writing, this process took approximately five to six sessions. The low percentile of the reading subtest and the result of the Informal Reading Inventory pretest had not underestimated the low literacy level of the students. Writing for these students was an arduous task. Fortunately, the combination of the pleasant

camaraderie created by the enjoyed literary experiences of the past days and the exciting prospect of taking on the role of storyteller themselves created an atmosphere that helped the students to overcome their frustration and complete several books. Nevertheless, the writing progress was painfully slow, and from day four of implementation, it was clear that the treatment would have to be modified.

The proposed design for each student to produce one big book per week had to be extended to approximately a four-week period. As each step of the curriculum design was an integral building block in the objective of improving literacy skills, the researcher opted for the formula that "less is more" and adjusted the format accordingly. The treatment, originally designed to use 12 Haitian folktales, would in the end use only four folktales.

Step 6: Students who completed the book were invited to share their story with another class. Teachers in bilingual classes were initially solicited in an effort to bolster the storyteller's confidence. The storytellers were consistently rewarded with a great deal of appreciation from the teacher and the class. The researcher observed the storytelling in her class on several occasions. The first-grade Haitian students in the researcher's class were overcome with joy at hearing stories with characters with whom they were familiar. The

Haitian children chimed in with refrains, and after the storyteller had left, were eager to repeat the story themselves. The obvious enthusiasm of the first graders was only surpassed by the glow of the storyteller as the class begged to be told the story once again. The pride of having written, illustrated, and shared a book about their own culture was evident by the storytellers' proud smiles of accomplishment as they took leave of the class.

Subsequent weeks followed the same format. The folktale, "The Magic Orange Tree," was selected next, and again was met with recognition and much appreciation on behalf of the students (Wolkstein, 1978). The pride the students took in completing the book was obvious as they painstakingly applied themselves to the written rendition. Illustrations became more detailed and colorful. One student even wrote the text using a different color crayon for each word. The result was a beautiful book typical of the colorful simplistic qualities of Haitian art. Motivated by the experience of sharing the stories, two boys who had "lost" their first book made it a point to complete the second book. Student writings became much longer. Also, students now wished to practice telling the story to our group before sharing their book with another class. This had not been taken into consideration in the curriculum design, yet the researcher readily agreed to the modification of the

plan. It was becoming obvious that as students took a greater interest in the project, their level of self-expectation increased. Although the researcher viewed this as a positive outcome, this also meant that more time was needed to complete the books. Whereas the first books had taken 20 sessions to complete, the second books took 25 sessions.

The third and fourth stories were parallel renditions of a well-known Haitian folktale. The first story, entitled "Mother of the Waters," was familiar to all of the students (Bayardelle, et al.). The first session of this story was spent in a typical manner with the teacher as storyteller and the students engaged as active listeners. During the following session, however, the parallel rendition, entitled "Take Me, Don't Take Me" was told by the teacher (Wolkstein, 1978). A class discussion of the similarities and differences of the renditions were recorded on chart paper. While the students listed similarities and differences, the teacher transcribed the list by making a Venn Diagram on chart paper.

During subsequent storytellings, the teacher would simply begin to tell the story without stating in advance which version would be told. Students accurately exercised critical thinking skills when asked to discern which rendition was being told. Both plots were then outlined in great detail on chart paper.

Although the stories themselves were selected partially due to their equivalent length, the student-dictated outlines became progressively longer. Whereas the first story outline had contained 215 words, the fourth and final story outline consisted of 915 words. The researcher believes that the length of the final story was partly due to the many details the students included to differentiate the two parallel renditions.

Students were given the option to rewrite the rendition they preferred. Much animated class discussion centered around which story was better and the teacher each time challenged the students to explain why they felt their preferred story was superior.

Evaluation

On the day prior to the commencement of the treatment, each participant was administered a Chapter I Informal Reading Assessment to determine grade-level reading placement (Appendix A: 44). The following results were compiled by the researcher: 33.2 percent of the students were reading at the second-grade level or below, and 66.8 percent of the students were reading at the low third-grade level.

On the day following the 12-week treatment, the same measure was administered to each participant to document the variation in reading grade levels. The results showed that 33.2

percent of the students had made little progress and were still reading at or below the second-grade level, 33.4 percent of the students now read at the fourth-grade level, and the remaining 33.4 percent read on the fifth-grade level.

The outcome was that two students, or 16.7 percent of the target population, incurred no increase in reading skills, 16.7 percent improved in reading skills by a .5 grade level; 41.6 percent increased reading skills by a full grade level, 16.7 percent improved by two full grade levels, and finally, one student, or 8.3 percent of the target population, demonstrated growth of 2.5 grade levels.

To assess the student's self-concept, a pretest in the form of a student survey was administered one day prior to treatment (Appendix B: 53). Likewise, the same survey served as the posttest and was given the day following the conclusion of treatment. The outcome of the student survey provided no substantial evidence of an increase in the target group's self-esteem. The results of questions pertaining directly to self-esteem remained consistent on the pre- and posttest: 90 percent of the Haitian students responded that they were proud of their cultural and linguistic affiliation.

To measure the attitudinal impact the study had upon student motivation in regard to literacy, the quantity of words used by the students in the written reconstruction of the story

was measured. On the average, the quantity of words between the writing of the first and last books doubled. In addition, the classroom teacher of the target population kept a log of each student which included the following information: date, student name, literature selected, period of SSR, and teacher's comments. The researcher was especially interested in monitoring which types of literature were selected (commercially-made books or the student-made books of Haitian folktales) and for what period of time the literature sustained their attention. The results demonstrated that students consistently chose literacy activities 83.42 percent of learning center time. When students were given the choice of literature, they chose to read the student-made Haitian books above American books 60.82 percent of the time.

Critical thinking skills were monitored by comparing story illustrations with student writing. The evolution of the illustrations led the researcher to conclude that the degree of understanding incurred a significant increase. Both the number and sequence of plot components consistently increased to substantiate an increased understanding of story structure. Finally, in the concluding stories of the study when parallel renditions of a folktale were made optional, the students' writings reflected consistency of plot components pertinent to the specific version of a folktale.

CHAPTER IV

Results

The treatment proved successful in meeting its primary objective of increasing a .75 grade level in 60 percent of the target population and a .5 grade level in 35 percent of the students. In actuality, findings showed a significant growth in reading skills: 66.6 percent of the target population incurred an average 1.8 grade level increase and 16.7 percent improved by a .5 grade level. The remaining 16.7 percent remained at the same reading level with a slight improvement in reading comprehension.

Storytelling thus proved to be an effective way to link the listening and reading skills that are the foundation of reading comprehension. According to Reilly (1989), "listening comprehension is achieved when the listener, the message, and the listening situation interact" (p. 93). Thus, the ESOL student as "listener" played an active role in the story. Oral interaction was encouraged as the storyteller facilitated listening comprehension by prompting the students with questions that encouraged them to make meaning of the story. In addition,

students were encouraged to interact by chiming in during their favorite parts, or by enhancing the story through physical responses such as facial expressions and gestures relevant to the story. Concurring with Clay's research (1991), the predictable themes of the stories, coupled with repeated renditions, enhanced listening comprehension. Lastly, because storytelling was a medium the students manifestly enjoyed, the oral tradition was effective in increasing motivation necessary for listening comprehension.

The findings of this study support Nessel's belief that language and structures used in stories resemble that of literature, and by hearing this powerful language, students learn to comprehend the structures and vocabulary met in reading (1985). In this way, storytelling helped to build the literacy background knowledge essential for reading development.

Critical Thinking Skills

The treatment was effective in meeting its second objective of increasing critical thinking skills by 20 percent in 100 percent of the target group. The substantial expansion of student writings and illustrations as compared with the first and last story demonstrated a significant increase in student understanding of story structure. The technique of

reconstructing literature helped students to develop concepts regarding story structure (Morrow, 1985), and these concepts, in turn, were added to the student's bank of literacy background knowledge required for critical thinking.

Modelled after a curriculum entitled the HOT Approach which explored the use of children's literature in the development of critical thinking skills (Reilly, 1989), parallel renditions of folktales were selected to enhance critical thinking skills. When called upon to compare and contrast the stories, "Mother of the Waters," and "Take Me, Don't Take Me," the students demonstrated the ability to analyze the structure of the stories. In rewriting the stories, the students remained consistent to the plot and did not confuse the two strikingly similar stories.

One student intentionally changed the ending of one of the stories to add to the comic twist typical of Haitian stories. This spark of creativity represents the critical thinking skills that were enhanced through the use of children's literature.

Although the current study was not as extensive as was projected in this area of treatment, the researcher concurs with Reilly that "comparing and contrasting the characters and story details of the various renditions is a concrete way to develop children's analytical skills" (1989:93).

Appreciation of Literacy Activities

The third objective, that 100 percent of the target group would incur a 40 percent increase in length of student writing met with success: analysis of student writings surpassed expectations by demonstrating an increase in word length by an average of 100 percent.

In addition, the objective of increasing the selection of literacy activities in the classroom by 25 percent in 100 percent of the target population was achieved. The selection of literacy activities during learning center time remained consistently high during treatment: students selected literacy activities 83.42 percent of the time. Significant to this study is that of the literacy activities the students chose, participants chose the student-made Haitian books 60.82 percent of the time.

The high rate of student motivation demonstrated by this study may be explained by several factors. The novelty of the folktales and the esoteric nature of the curriculum was clearly very exciting for the students. Being a part of the target group, coupled with the opportunity of acting as a storyteller in another class, were perceived as privileges by the class as a whole.

Moreover, responses to questions four and six of the attitudinal survey (Appendix B: 53) indicated on both the pre- and posttest a high degree of interest in reading about Haiti and learning more about Haitian culture.

Research also supports the necessity of developing instructional strategies with an understanding and appreciation of the home culture of children from minority groups (Morrow, 1992). In the Haitian culture, verbal facility is valued by all classes and is demonstrated by the Haitian's love of repartee, the role that elaborate speeches play in political life, and the popular pastime of storytelling (Library of Congress, 1991). Due to these many factors, storytelling proved to be a valuable technique in promoting literacy by motivating the Haitian ESOL student.

Self-Concept

The fourth and final objective was a 20 percent increase in 100 percent of the target group's self-esteem. This objective was formulated upon the thesis that multicultural literature can be used to help students develop a healthy self-concept (Walker-Dalhouse, 1992, Diakiw, 1990, Gaffney, 1991, Norton, 1990). Delpit (1991) asserts that it is the educator's obligation to transmit cultural values to children from minority groups to help build their sense of identity and self-esteem. By

validating the social order within the home culture, it was hoped that Haitian literature would serve as "bibliotherapy" to improve the Haitian students' self-identity and respect of their cultural heritage (Radencich, 1985: 528).

To measure this affective outcome, a pre- and posttest in the form of a student survey was administered (Appendix B: 53). In both surveys 91.7 percent of the students indicated that they were proud to be Haitian; only one student, representing 8.3 percent, responded by indifference. Therefore, no modification in the target group's self-esteem was measured. While the results were heartening, such an outcome was clearly unanticipated. In retrospect, the researcher would have selected a different means of assessing the students' self-esteem. The validity of the student survey itself may be questioned, as well as the manner in which the assessment was conducted. The survey would have been less biased by peer pressure had it been administered on an individual basis rather than in a group setting.

CHAPTER V

Recommendations

Considering the positive outcome of improved literacy among the Haitian students who participated in the study, it is the researcher's recommendation that the use of Haitian folktales be an integral part of the whole language curriculum in the ESOL classroom where Haitian students are present.

In order to make this treatment applicable to the regular ESOL classroom, the format could be modified in several different ways. Ideally the classroom teacher could team with other ESOL classes to provide the daily 30-minute sessions with the Haitian students. During this time another ESOL teacher could provide a similar program for the Hispanic students. Storytelling allows for a combination of various grade levels and promotes cooperative learning -- two elements that would make team teaching a valid alternative.

If this option was not deemed feasible, the classroom teacher could integrate the storytelling into the regular language arts curriculum. During the time devoted to the Haitian storytelling, the other students could work at learning centers or on other projects. The storytelling could also be enhanced by extending

the realm of storytelling to include Hispanic folktales, or tales from other lands depending upon the student population. If this were the case, the teacher might opt for a Whole Language Multicultural Approach, alternately delivering stories from both cultures to the class as a whole. Clearly, many options are possible depending upon the willingness of the classroom teacher.

As a function of a school-wide project for school improvement, the practicum was extended to promote Haitian integration in the school. The students involved in the initial study visited many classrooms during the course of the first semester to share Haitian folktales. The Haitian students were thus rewarded for their literacy behavior by being given a position of authority (storyteller). By presenting the Haitian student in this positive light to the mainstream population, it was hoped that the Haitian students' roles within the school would improve and that this in turn will have a ripple effect in improved racial relations within the student body. This study is currently ongoing and therefore remains inconclusive at this point.

Finally, to share the outcome of this study, the researcher will present the findings at a meeting of the Florida Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) Council to be held in January 1993.

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Appendices

CHAPTER 1 INFORMAL ORAL READING INVENTORY
Grades 2-5

Examiner's
Individual Pupil Record

Name _____ Examiner _____

School _____ Grade _____

Chapter 1 Teacher _____ Classroom Teacher _____

☐ Form One

☐ Form Two

	Basal Placement	Date of Testing	Instructional Level
Initial	_____	_____	_____
Mid-Year	_____	_____	_____
Final	_____	_____	_____

SUMMARY OF APPARENT DIFFICULTIES
(Check each item that is applicable.)

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| _____ Reads word-by-word | _____ Substitutes words |
| _____ Phrases poorly | _____ Omits words |
| _____ Uses monotonous tone | _____ Repeats words or phrases |
| _____ Ignores punctuations | _____ Loses place |
| _____ Inserts words | _____ Reverses letters or words |
| _____ Confuses words of similar form | _____ Appears tense or nervous |
| _____ Applies phonetic skills inadequately | |
| _____ Does not attempt to apply word attack skills | |
| _____ Applies structural analysis skills inadequately | |

Comments _____

THE SCHOOL BOARD OF BROWARD COUNTY, FLORIDA

Revised July, 1992

Form One
Level - Preprimer

26 words
1 error allowed

STORY

Look at the boat, Mother.
It is big and blue.
It can go fast.
I want to ride in it.
Come on and ride with me.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

- ___ 1. To whom was the child talking in this story? (Mother)
- ___ 2. What did the child show Mother? (a boat)
- ___ 3. What color was the boat? (blue)
- ___ 4. What did the child want to do? (ride in the boat)
- ___ 5. How many were riding in the boat? (two)

SUMMARY

Number of Word Errors _____

Number of Right Answers _____

STORY

The door of the house was open.
A little girl sat down by the door.
Her brown puppy was with her.
She did not look happy.
The little puppy did not look happy.
The rain was coming down.
Down, down it came.
"You can not play in the rain,"
said Mother.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

- ___ 1. In this story what was open in the house? (the door)
- ___ 2. Who sat down by the door? (a little girl; a little girl and her puppy)
- ___ 3. What color was the puppy? (brown)
- ___ 4. Why did the little girl not look happy? (It was raining; the rain was coming down; she wanted to play in the rain.)
- ___ 5. What did Mother tell the little girl? (You can not play in the rain.)

SUMMARY

Number of Word Errors _____

Number of Right Answers _____

STORY

One morning Mother said, "I have a surprise for you. It is out in the barn. Come along with me and I will show you." As they started down the walk, they heard a small noise. Mother asked, "Now, can you guess what it is?" "I can," said the boy. "It is a new calf."

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

- ___ 1. What time of day does the story say it is? (morning)
- ___ 2. Where did Mother have the surprise? (in the barn)
- ___ 3. For whom is the surprise? (the boy)
- ___ 4. Where did Mother and the boy hear the small noise? (as they started down the walk)
- ___ 5. What was the surprise? (a new calf)

SUMMARY

Number of Word Errors _____

Number of Right Answers _____

STORY

Dottie is a very old elephant. She is a kind elephant. At one time Dottie had been in a circus. A funny little clown worked with her. When the circus man said, "We can not keep her," Dottie went to live at the zoo. Every day she takes the boys and girls for a ride. The children laugh and are happy. Dottie likes to make all these children happy.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

- ___ 1. What kind of elephant was Dottie? (old, kind)
- ___ 2. Where had Dottie worked before going to the zoo? (at the circus)
- ___ 3. Who worked at the circus with the old elephant? (a clown, a funny little clown)
- ___ 4. Who no longer wanted to keep her? (the man, the circus man)
- ___ 5. What made the children happy? (going for a ride on the elephant)

SUMMARY

Number of Word Errors _____

Number of Right Answers _____

STORY

The gas that you see coming out of the bottom of the rocket makes it move. The rocket makes its own gas right inside. It carries different things needed in space. This makes it able to go anywhere. When a rocket takes off, it suddenly pushes straight up through the air. The top of the rocket has a point which cuts through space. The bottom end is open to let the gas rush out.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

- ___ 1. What makes the rocket move? (gas)
- ___ 2. Where does the rocket make its gas? (right inside)
- ___ 3. What does the rocket carry? (many different things needed in space)
- ___ 4. How does the pointed top of the rocket help? (It cuts through space.)
- ___ 5. Why is the bottom end of the rocket open? (to let the gas rush out)

SUMMARY

Number of Word Errors _____

Number of Right Answers _____

STORY

Long ago, Indian boys could hardly wait for the night of the story telling. Everyone gathered around the Chief. On that night, he would call one of the boys to sit by him. The Chief would tell a story about how well the boy could shoot, or how fast he could run, or how high he could jump. After the Chief told the story once, it would be told again on other storytelling nights for years and years.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

- ___ 1. When did the story say that Indian boys could hardly wait for storytelling? (long ago)
- ___ 2. Who was the storyteller in this story? (the Chief)
- ___ 3. What would the Chief do before the story began? (He would call one of the boys to sit by him.)
- ___ 4. About whom was his story that night? (the boy whom he called)
- ___ 5. Name some things he told about the boy. (how well the boy could shoot; how fast the boy could run; how high the boy could jump)

SUMMARY

Number of Word Errors _____

Number of Right Answers _____

STORY

It was a blazing hot summer afternoon. Cars whizzed along Highway 66. Except for the passengers in the cars, the old peddler seemed to be the only one on the road. The shadows of late afternoon danced across the road. The scattered clouds sometimes made a shady spot as the sun passed behind them. The tired peddler was thirsty and hungry as he struggled along with his heavy pack.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

- ___ 1. What was the weather like on this summer afternoon? (hot; blazing hot)
- ___ 2. Were the cars traveling fast or slow on the highway? (fast)
- ___ 3. Who was traveling Highway 66 other than the passengers in the cars? (a peddler)
- ___ 4. How did the peddler feel? (tired, hungry and thirsty)
- ___ 5. Why do you think he carried this heavy pack along? (things to sell; his clothing; things he needs, etc.)

SUMMARY

Number of Word Errors _____

Number of Right Answers _____

STORY

House cats are not the only members of the feline family. Tigers, lions, and jaguars are also felines. These three animals are alike in some ways. They all leap and run and pounce and snarl. They each have five toes on their front paws and four toes on their back ones. Their long, sharp claws are used for climbing, catching food, and protecting them from other animals.

You probably would not want a tiger, lion, or jaguar for a pet, but many people have house cats as pets. They are among the smartest of all domesticated animals and can be taught to do numerous tricks, but they don't like to be bossed.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

- ___ 1. Which members of the feline family can leap, run, pounce, and snarl? (house cats, tigers, lions, jaguars)
- ___ 2. How are cat's front paws different from their back paws? (five toes on front paws; four toes on back paws)
- ___ 3. Why do cats need sharp claws? (climbing; catching food; to protect them from other animals)
- ___ 4. Which kind of cats do most people have as pets? (house cats)
- ___ 5. Which of the cats mentioned in the story do not like to be bossed? (house cats)

SUMMARY

Number of Word Errors _____

Number of Right Answers _____

Appendix B

Pre/Posttest Student Survey

Listen while the teacher reads aloud the following questions and choices. Then circle the answer that best fits your feelings. There are no right or wrong answers.

- 1) I know _____ Haitian stories.
 - a) some
 - b) a lot
 - c) none
- 2) When I tell other people that I am Haitian, I _____.
 - a) am proud
 - b) don't care
 - c) am unhappy
- 3) I _____ that I speak Creole.
 - a) am proud
 - b) don't care
 - c) am unhappy
- 4) When I read about Haiti, I am _____ interested.
 - a) a little
 - b) very
 - c) not
- 5) When I tell my American friends that my parents speak Creole, I _____.
 - a) am proud
 - b) don't care
 - c) am unhappy
- 6) I would like to know _____ about Haiti and Haitian culture.
 - a) a little
 - b) a lot
 - c) nothing

Critical Thinking and Self-Reflection Checklist

The GEM Practicum Internship

John Barell - (Adapted)

Using a scale of 1 to 5, rate your work setting according to the following items:

5=Very Often 4=Often 3=Sometimes 2=Seldom 1=Rarely

CLASSROOM

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. When students pose unusual or divergent questions, I ask, "What made you think of that?" | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 2. Information in the text is challenged. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 3. When a decision has to be made between involving the class discussion of an intriguing student idea (topic related) or moving on to "cover" content, I choose the former. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 4. I encourage participants to seek alternative answers. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 5. The target group receives positive reinforcement for initiating questions. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 6. Problems are used as a means for the target group to generate their own questions (or problems), which we then seriously consider. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 7. Teaching and learning occur without teacher talk. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 8. Most questions posed during class can be answered with short or one-word answers. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 9. Students spontaneously engage in critiquing each other's thinking. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 10. Students are encouraged to relate subject matter to experiences in other subjects or to their personal lives. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

. . .

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11. I stress how to think, not what to think. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 12. Students often set objectives for their own learning. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 13. Students spend time working collaboratively to solve subject matter questions. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 14. One focus in my implementation is trying to help others understand how and why people (mentioned in texts) created ideas, solutions, experiments, rules, principles, and so on. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 15. Students actively listen to each other. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 16. I facilitate collaborative instructional problem solving. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |